

First photo ID election a success

by Texas Secretary of State John Steen

The November 5 election was the first statewide election where Texans had to show a photo ID when voting in person. As the Texas Secretary of State and chief election officer, I am proud to report that the election was smooth, secure and successful.

Reports from election officials across the state were positive. More than a million Texans voted in the constitutional amendment election, a 66 percent increase over our last constitutional amendment election in November 2011.

Two factors contributed to the successful implementation of the photo ID law: educating voters and making the photo ID requirement as simple to follow as possible.

On the education front, my office launched a statewide, full-fledged voter education campaign that included print, radio, television and digital advertising. I also personally traveled to every corner of the state to raise awareness about the photo ID requirement.

In my travels, I learned about the commendable efforts by local election officials to meet the specific needs of their communities. These efforts included visits to nursing homes, advertising on public transportation, and even photo ID education posters displayed at a favorite barbeque joint.

On the simplicity front, our office and other state offices worked to anticipate problems and resolve them before they could be an issue for a voter.

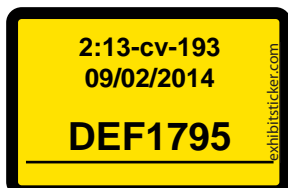
Voting by mail is a simple option for some because the new photo ID requirement applies only to in-person voting. Texas law allows voters 65 and older or those with a disability to vote by mail.

But what if you don't have an approved ID and don't qualify or don't want to vote by mail? The law allows you to get a free Election Identification Certificate (EIC) from our Department of Public Safety (DPS).

But the state didn't just stop at free. DPS opened almost 50 offices on Saturdays to issue EICs, and, in partnership with my office, 25 mobile stations traversed the state to issue EICs and enhance access and convenience for voters. In those counties without DPS driver license offices, election officials were offered training and materials in order to directly issue EICs.

Because some applicants for an EIC would need to get a certified copy of their birth certificates, the Department of State Health Services reduced the price to just \$3 instead of the usual \$22 or \$23 if it was being used to get an EIC.

The state worked to make getting an EIC as convenient as possible.



There was also speculation about possible complications when a voter's photo ID name and voter registration name were not an exact match. However, this was not a problem. All a voter with a mismatched name is required to do is initial a box confirming he or she is one and the same person. It is a circumstance that affected both men and women, but the process was designed in a way that it didn't stop a single voter.

In fact, no voter was turned away because of photo ID requirements. In the rare circumstance when an in-person voter could not produce a photo ID, he or she was able to vote provisionally and then had through November 12 to present an approved photo ID to the county registrar and have that vote counted.

Provisional ballots were almost never needed though. They made up 0.2 percent of all votes and often had nothing to do with photo ID requirements but were cast for other reasons such as a voter name not appearing on the registration roll.

November 5 was the first statewide test for photo ID. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of county election officials in our 254 counties Texas passed with flying colors. We aren't, however, resting on our laurels. My office is busy preparing for the March primaries.

Rest assured that Texans can continue to put their faith in our state's election process.

John Steen is the 108th Texas Secretary of State, and as chief election officer for the state he helps oversee the uniform application and interpretation of election law in Texas.